

# CHRONICLE AND COMMENT OF THE STAGE



Jeanne Eagels in "Daddies" (© STRAUSS REYNOL)

## "Crowded Hour" Shows Much Skill

By Heywood Brown

"The Crowded Hour" has most of the faults of the war plays, but it has more virtues. It benefits, for instance, from the fine performance of Miss Jane Cowl. This is probably a better performance than any other war play the season has shown us, unless it is the Old Bill of Charles Coburn in "The Better 'Ole," which is in quite a different vein.

Miss Cowl has improved since her first night, during which she was under an unusual strain. She keeps the part more closely in hand during the exciting scene at the telephone switchboard when she saves a French division. Perhaps the best work which she does comes in the final act. This is not a very convincing piece of writing, or at any rate it is a scene which presents great difficulties, coming as it does on the heels of the crowded act of the evening. Miss Cowl manages to hold it up. Although she has had many fearful plays and wept enough to fill the Hippodrome tank in her short stage career, she actually can make grief appealing. But it is in some of her quietest moments that she does her best work. She listens extremely well, and this is an art known only to a limited number of players. The best reading of the evening occurs in a bit which Miss Cowl translates for some one else on the stage. One of the French characters, an old grandmother, says something about her three sons who have been killed in the war and Miss Cowl repeats the remark for an American character. She resists all temptation to dress up the words into any emotional appeal. She does not even attempt to echo the emotion of the mother, but repeats the little bit so simply that the same passage of the play scores twice.

We would not contend for a moment that Miss Jane Cowl is an actress who makes no mistakes in her efforts to convey emotional crises, but we can think of no other young American actress who can do quite as many things and do them as well.

Just about the most skillful playwrighting in "The Crowded Hour" is the use of French snatches. The characters are not nearly as courteous as those in "Three Faces East." As we remember, never speak their own language, even to each other, without immediately translating it into English. Although the French folk of "The Crowded Hour" are not as accommodating, they are more effective. Most of the French speeches are allowed to stand without translation. Little or nothing is lost, because in every case the situation gives the clue to the general drift of the few sentences, and moreover the eloquence of Mme. Michellette Burani must reach even those who have not a *jargon* to their names.

Still another factor enters in, and that is the element of excitement. When action is progressing rapidly in a play the spoken word matters very little. At least it is not important that it should be heard exactly, and it never is. When pace is fast enough an audience skips through the dialogue, mentally retaining only just what it needs. That need is often no more than the tone of a voice, and we will wager that a great many people will thrill to the speech

of the old French woman in "The Crowded Hour," even if they do not understand a word she says. The authors have been careful to translate only the important speeches and in each case they have arranged the situation so that the translation shall seem to be made solely for the benefit of some one on the stage, and not for the audience at all.

"The Crowded Hour" has its moments of false sentiment, but some of its moments are real, and even if its story is not always eloquent it is generally intelligent, and that is more than can be said for most of the war plays. We mean intelligent in a dramatic sense. Not all its military implications are correct. Neither telephone girl, for instance, ever salutes any superior officer, while the young French liaison officer seems to have almost as wide powers as a Marshal of France. We also wondered just what sort of projectiles Orme Caldara had been encountering at the front. He came out of the trenches with his uniform full of small holes and rips. He seemed much more like a man who had been to a Madison Square mass meeting than a veteran of the trenches.

Any player who is cast to act a shouting scene with Georges Plateau is apt to lose the scene. This young French actor has such a sure command of English that when he is called upon to play at top speed and somewhere near top voice he never loses anything of coherence.

"Please accept my sincerest thanks for your kindly appreciation of my set for 'The Princess Marries the Page' at the Provincetown Players. If you had not liked it I should have been quite content to hide behind the typographical error in my name, but since you praise it, I ask you: How can I achieve fame when the programme prints me C. M. Sox? The New York Tribune, C. M. Cox, and all the while I am really, yours very truly, C. M. Sax?"

We suppose it is too late to suggest to Mr. Knoblock the possibility of "Tomcat! Tomcat!" as a title for his play.

## Vaudeville

**PALACE**—Bert Williams, making a three-week excursion into vaudeville, will spend the first week at the Palace. Lieutenant Gitz-Rice, the Canadian soldier whose own songs and stories were a feature of "Getting Together," also makes this his first stopping place on a brief vaudeville tour. Adelaide and Hughes remain for a third week. Other attractive features are the Watson Sisters, Mrs. Gene Hughes in a sketch by Edgar Allen Woolf and Mirano Brothers.

**RIVERSIDE**—Lillian Russell is the headliner. James J. Corbett and James Wilson, blackface comedian, will make their first New York appearance together. Nan Halperin remains another week. Emma Haig and Lou Lickett, Emily Francis Hooper and Klein Brothers are also on the bill.

**COLONIAL**—Lucille Cavanaugh is this week's chief attraction. On the supporting bill are Joe Laurie and Aileen Bronson in a comedy skit, en-



Wilda Bennett in "The Girl Behind the Gun" (© STRAUSS REYNOL)



Helen Mae Keller in "The Unknown Purple"



Christopher Hayes and Leo Harrup in "Good Luck, Sam!"

itled "Let 'Er Go," Valerie Bergere in her Japanese play, "Little Cherry Blossom"; Ted Doner, entertaining singly, and several other well known acts.

**ALHAMBRA**—Bessie Clayton in her dance revue remains the headline attraction for a second week. Henry Lewis, monologist; Harry Green, Hebrew comedian; Walter De Leon and Mary Davies in a sketch called "Behind the Front" and the Harlequin Trio are a few of the numbers on the bill.

**ROYAL**—Eddie Leonard plays a return engagement by request. Charles (Chic) Sale, impersonator of rural types, will present "The Rural Sunday School Benefit." Other favorites on the bill are Johnny Dooley and Yvette Rugel, Stan Stanley, Haru Onuki, Japanese prima donna; the Gardiner Trio, Helen Edgar and Babe, the Century Four and Hazel Moran.

**LOEW'S AMERICAN**—Harris and Morey, in new songs and pianologue, and "Mendow Brook Lane," with George Whitaker, by Edgar Allen Woolf, are the vaudeville features the early part of the week. Mabel Norman in "Mickey" is the picture feature. The second half "The Oriental Girl" will head the vaudeville bill, and the picture feature is "Danger, Go Slow," with Mae Murray.

## One-Week Houses

**STANDARD**—"The Matinee Hero," with Leo Ditrichstein, comes here direct from its run at the Vanderbilt Theatre.

**SHUBERT-RIVIERA**—Marjorie Rambeau in "Where Poppies Bloom" is this week's offering.

**LOEW'S SEVENTH AVENUE**—This week's attraction is Mark Swan's farce, "She Walked in Her Sleep."

**BRONX OPERA HOUSE**—"The Wanderer," the spectacular Biblical play, will be seen here.

## Brooklyn

**MONTAUK**—"AIDA" opens the week's engagement of the Crantor Opera Company. There will be a change of bill at each performance. Some of the well known singers in the company are Jeanne Gordon, Serge Zance, Greek Evans and Alfredo Valenti.

**MAJESTIC**—Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew will appear personally, in "Keep Her Smiling."

## Shakespeare's Playhouse to Give Matinee of "Macbeth"

The Shakespeare Playhouse announces the final performance of Walter Hampden in "Hamlet" in the present series of special Friday afternoon matinees at the Plymouth Theatre, to be given December 6, at 3 o'clock.

Walter Hampden in "Macbeth" will be presented for one special matinee on Saturday morning, December 7, at 11 o'clock. This is the "company piece" to Mr. Hampden's Hamlet in his Shakespeare Playhouse productions, and he will be supported by a remarkable cast. Gilda Varesi, Muncie Modjeska's protegee, coached in all her roles, will play Lady Macbeth. Albert Brumby will have the role of Macduff; J. Harry Irvine the Banquo; George Gault the Malcolm and Charles Webster the Ross.



Lola Fisher in "Be Calm Camilla"

## Novelty Introduced Into "Good Luck, Sam"

When Geraldine Farrar stepped from her box to the stage of the Lexington Theatre during the opening performance of "Good Luck, Sam," on Monday night, and sang "Mighty Lak a Rose," she started something—to use the vernacular of the boys from Camp Merritt.

Her appearance was the outcome of the court martial scene wherein the prisoner about to be tried "wouldn't mind being tried if he could once hear Geraldine Farrar sing." The incident came impromptu and was a complete surprise to the "actors" and the audience, but it went over so big the soldiers have decided to keep it in the programme. However, instead of Miss Farrar continuing in the programme at each performance a different artist will be drafted from the audience to grant the wish of the prisoner. Miss Natalie Alt is the most recent conscript to oblige.

## Arthur Hopkins Has Woolcott Play

Arthur Hopkins has just accepted, by cable, a play concerning which he knows nothing more than that the author of it is Sergeant Alexander Woolcott, former dramatic critic of "The New York Times," that it is now being written in France, and that its title is "World Without End."

Sergeant Woolcott has been, since January of this year, the reporter at the front for the army newspaper, "The Stars and Stripes." On the night before the armistice was signed he sent a postcard to Mr. Hopkins saying that he was beginning the play under the last raid of the war, and that he would send it on to be read as soon as it was finished. Mr. Hopkins's cable of acceptance left immediately for France, and he hopes to have the manuscript in time to present it early next season.

## "When a Feller Needs a Friend" at the New Amsterdam To-night

The Stage Woman's War Relief will launch a drive in aid of the Allied War Orphans by presenting at the New Amsterdam Theatre to-night the comedy melodrama, "When a Feller Needs a Friend," by Harvey O'Higgins and Harriet Ford. The authors have donated the play, Mosses, Klaw & Erlanger have donated the theatre and George Broadhurst has given the scenery. Claire Briggs, the cartoonist, who originated the title of the play, will sketch between the acts. The proceeds will go toward publishing the play, with pictures of the cast and full stage instructions, for distribution among amateur dramatic societies throughout the country, who will pledge themselves to present it in their communities for the Allied War Orphans' Fund.

That the little waifs of the war may be given some of the necessities of life in the long hard winter of Northern France that is upon them, a group of famous actors and actresses and a famous director have volunteered their services for this performance.

The brilliant cast, assembled under the direction of Arthur Hopkins, includes Viola Allen, Maclyn Arbuckle, Florine Arnold, Janet Beecher, Emmett Corrigan, Robert Edson, Shelley Hull, O. P. Heggie, Tim Murphy, Hamilton Revelle, Charlotte Walker, H. B. Warner and Helen Westley.

President Wilson has approved the plan. Prominent members of the Cabinet, as well as Governor Whitman and District Attorney Swann, are giving their personal endorsement to this appealing and worthy effort, and there is no possibility of profit for any one except the thousands of destitute orphans left in the wake of the war.

## Lauder Coming to Lexington for a Week

When Harry Lauder begins his world's tour at the Lexington Theatre on Monday evening, December 3, he will introduce a quota of new songs. He has spent all of his time entertaining the men at the battle fronts since he last appeared here, and his new compositions reflect to a certain degree the spirit which he encountered.

Lauder and his company are to be at the Lexington Theatre for only one week, after which they will play short engagements in Brooklyn and Newark before starting on their extended tour.

## Yvette Guilbert to Lecture At Neighborhood Playhouse

On Tuesday evening, December 3, Mme. Yvette Guilbert will lecture on "The Art of Interpretation" at the Neighborhood Playhouse. To-night the third performance of the Festival of Tabernacles will be given with the Festival Chorus, the Festival Dancers and the Neighborhood Players. The music has been arranged by George Barrere.

## For Two Weeks More

Because of the unusually heavy demand for seats to see David Warfield in "The Auctioneer," he has been forced to extend his engagement at the Manhattan Opera House for an additional two weeks, bringing the run there to an end on Saturday night, December 14.

## Free Vaudeville For Enlisted Men

For the free Sunday matinee vaudeville given by the New York Camp Community Service, at the Manhattan Opera House, Thirty-fourth Street, between Eighth and Ninth avenues, the following will appear: Alice Brady, Jack Hazard, Doyle and Dixon, Princess White Deer, De Haven and Nice, William J. Reilly of the United States Navy, Mr. and Mrs. Fowler, Clifton Crawford and Sam Bernard. Curtain will be at 2 p. m. All men in uniform will be admitted free.



Walker Whiteside and Byron Power in "The Little Brother"

## Miss Kummer Throws The Rule Book Overboard

By Ralph Block

If I believed very firmly in the Pinero version of the Sardou sort of thing—which, God help me, I don't—I would never set foot inside of a theatre that had Clare Kummer on the boards. I would make that resolve and stick to it firmly. If I meant to go on being captain of my soul there'd be no other way to do, because Clare Kummer shatters everything Sardou taught, everything Pinero does, and then retires in the vague distance waving a blithe-some hand at you.

If you had spent all your dramatic life cramming on finished technique, and had grown up in the idea that a play wasn't a play unless people walked off to let other people come on, and that a stage has an absolute number of exits and entrances and that climaxes can always be timed perfectly in the next to the last act—in short all the things they teach in Freytag and at Columbia, it would be a tragic experience to discover somebody who could make a fascinating, delightful and seductive play without doing any of these things. "Be Calm, Camilla," which is the current version of Clare Kummer, is that kind of a play.

Some day, of course, it was bound to happen that somebody would write a play without observing any of the rules and get away with it. Clare Kummer has already done it several times, but if any one has doubts about the success of writing without the rules as a method, the play at the Booth ought to remove them.

It becomes clear on seeing the latest Kummer play that drama is not, after all, only the things most of the night said it was. For years and years it was much as his life was worth for a simple and unaccustomed playgoer to object to the current drama on the ground that people didn't do things that way. The critics made it plain that life was one thing and the stage was something else. A man might walk into a room any time he pleased in real life, but it wasn't a thing that could be done on the stage. It had to be planned. The dramatist was always laying for somebody to come on the stage, so to speak, and had a perfect ambuscade of words, phrases and episodes ready to greet him.

The sin of Clare Kummer is that she doesn't do any of this at all. All the opportunities to shine as a master of finished carpentry, of stage joinery, all the chances to flash in ten volumes as the most finished technician of the American stage, have been flipped overboard into the wide sea of time by the careless Miss Kummer, without so much as a sigh or a regret to mourn the passing. But it would be a mistake to declare that there is no bravura in the Kummer methodless method. It is difficult to find, being subtle, and it is more extraordinary when found because it is so entirely in time and color with the very spirit which pervades all the Kummer plays.

Indeed, to properly characterize this Emily Dickinson of the Broadway Theatre, you can't avoid talking about the distilled essence which gives life to the

things she does. She is not a wit, but her plays are the wittiest now being shown. She is a sentimentalist, but her plays are the most humorous New York has seen for a long time. She has nothing so direct and clear cut in her style as the propensity for paradox would demand, but her writing style is full of the kind of opposition and inversion which illuminates life by holding it up and whirling it in the light. Her plays are formless, skippy, as light as the summer clothing of a dried and as easily caught by all the winds. Yet, hunt up and down Broadway to find anything as possessed of style, of quality, of that indistinguishable but essential thing that separates art from merchandize.

The point about Clare Kummer, if anything so definite as a point can be found about her, is that she herself has a highly complicated and civilized way of looking at things. You can characterize it, but you can't successfully say what it is. It is elfin, it is fleeting, it is flashing like a will o' the wisp through the woods. It is a sudden smiling face peering around the corner of the world and then gone suddenly out of view. It is a kitten that can't be caught, always being an ell beyond where your hand is when you grab at it.

Wit nowadays has become highly conventionalized. A well educated playgoer can make out a pattern for witty plays and find that they all fall into two or three styles. He can even time the repartee and come pretty close to it. But there is nothing like this in the Kummer plays. And being unconventionalized, entirely out of the expected pattern, it performs the function of the laughing arts in a special and highly successful fashion.

What is the aim of laughter but to break up what has become set, to inform and lighten life by shattering all cliches, all formalisms, exposing all the rigidities men adopt partly out of human stupidity and the failures of human insight, and partly because of the pressure of living? But to become aware of laughter before it happens is to blunt the edge of it.

That points the way to Clare Kummer. She is entirely unexpected—always. Her plots are as unexpected as her people and the things they say. One reason they are unexpected is because they are so much like real things. And for so long that has been taboo on the stage.

## Dunsany and Walker to Meet

Stuart Walker has just received a letter from Lord Dunsany saying that he will arrive in New York early in January. Though they have carried on a three years' correspondence—much of which has been published—this will be the first meeting of the Irish playwright and his American producer, who has presented to American audiences "The Gods of the Mountains," "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior," "The Golden Doom," and other works of the great Irish dramatist. Dunsany never saw any of these presentations, for he has been in the war since its beginning as captain of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. He has been wounded and now comes to America by special permission.

## New Plays This Week

**MONDAY**—At the 39th Street Theatre, John D. Williams and Walter Hest will present a new play in four acts entitled, "Betty at Bay," by Jessie Porter. The play was presented in London and is English in its locale. J. H. Barnes, who played the leading role in the English production, will also be one of the leading players in its American version. Doris Rankin enacts the leading role of Betty. Others in the cast are Alison Skipworth, Charles A. Stevenson, Malcolm Mortimer, Maud Andrews and Marguerite Leonard.

At the French Theatre du Vieux Colombar Ibsen's "Roosmorholm" will be given. Charles Dullin will play Johannes Rosmer, Mme. Van Doren will be Rebecca, Louis Jouvet will be seen as Ulrik Brendel, Romain Bouquet will be seen as Mortensgaard, and Suzanne Bing as Mme. Helseth.